RESEARCH

A REPORT OF THE
PLANNING AND RESEARCH BRANCH
MANITOBA EDUCATION

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This report is intended for information only,
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SUMMARY

This report provides an overview of Canadian public attitudes on education through an examination of eight recently conducted public opinion polls. Highlights of the public's opinions on educational issues follow.

- The general public is solidly supportive of education, describing it as being extremely important to one's future success.

- The public have multiple and often inconsistent expectations of what the schools should be doing. Preparing students for the world of work is one role of the schools that many people feel has not been given enough attention.

- In spite of a significant variability of opinion, the Canadian public appear to be reasonably satisfied with the quality of the schools.

- The general public identify a great variety of concerns regarding the public schools, however no specific problem is especially prevalent.

- There is significant disagreement on the part of the public regarding who is responsible for education, and whether decision-making authority should reside at the local level or at the provincial government level.

- Public involvement and contact with the schools is low and, as a whole, the public want this to increase.

- The general public is cautiously supportive of educational funding, but are concerned that more money doesn't necessarily mean better education.

- There is strong disagreement on the part of the public regarding which specific programs and curriculum choices should be provided by the schools.

The public believe that education is important, but this report shows that they are far from being in agreement on how the educational system should be improved. Apart from a few areas of consensus, the public want very different things for their schools, and this is a fact that policy makers will need to come to terms with.

RÉSUMÉ

Fondé sur une étude de huit sondages d'opinion publique menés dernièrement, le présent rapport donne une vue d'ensemble des diverses attitudes du public canadien sur l'éducation. Voici les points saillants des opinions émises sur des questions d'éducation :

- Le grand public s'est déclaré fermement en faveur de l'éducation et lui accorde une grande importance dans l'obtention du succès.

- Les gens ont des attentes multiples et souvent incompatibles vis-à-vis du rôle des écoles. La tâche de préparer les élèves à s'intégrer au monde du travail est l'un des aspects qui, selon de nombreuses personnes, n'a pas reçu suffisamment d'attention.

- Malgré des divergences d'opinion considérables, les Canadiens semblent être raisonnablement satisfaits de la qualité des écoles.

- Le public a formulé une grande variété de questions se rapportant aux écoles publiques; toutefois, aucun problème précis ne prédomine.

- Il y a un sérieux désaccord au sein du public sur la question de savoir qui est responsable de l'éducation et qui devrait être chargé de prendre les décisions, les organismes locaux ou le gouvernement provincial?

- L'engagement du public dans les affaires scolaires et la communication avec les écoles sont faibles, mais dans l'ensemble, les gens voudraient que cette situation s'améliore.

- Le grand public n'appuie qu'avec une certaine réserve le mode de financement actuel du système d'éducation et il craint que l'octroi de fonds supplémentaires n'améliorera pas nécessairement la qualité de l'éducation.

- Il y a un désaccord profond au sein du public quant aux choix de programmes d'études que doivent offrir les écoles.

Selon ce rapport, le public croit que l'éducation est importante, mais les gens ne sont pas du tout d'accord sur la façon d'améliorer le système scolaire. À part certains points où les opinions sont communes, les gens s'entendent très peu sur l'orientation à donner à nos écoles; il s'agit là d'une réalité que devront prendre en considération ceux qui établissent les politiques dans ce domaine.

INTRODUCTION

Education is under pressure to do more and to do it better. As one way of understanding the demands being made, in the past two or three years a substantial number of public opinion polls have been conducted. While many of these polls have been carried out by governments, it is clear that there is general interest in the public's views regarding educational issues. In addition to provincial departments of education, various other organizations such as teachers' societies, school trustees' associations and universities, have all recently participated in sounding out public opinion on education.

This report examines some recent public opinion polls and brings together findings which reveal the general picture of Canadian public opinion about education. Eight Canadian polls were examined for this purpose. The studies included were conducted by (or for):

- The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (1982);
- Alberta Education (1984);
- University of Manitoba Institute for Social and Economic Research (1984);
- Manitoba Education (1984);
- Memorial University of Newfoundland Faculty of Education (1983);
- Saskatchewan School Trustees' Association (1984);
- Calgary Board of Education (1983); and,
- Canadian Education Association (1984).

Specific references are made to these polls throughout the report and results from individual questions are included as "Sample Findings", intended to illustrate what are considered to be national trends in each topic area discussed. In addition, brief descriptions of each study are included in the appendix.

Although a few of the studies touched briefly on adult and post-secondary education, the focus was always on public school education. As a result, this report will deal solely with opinion related to the public school system. The report will also concentrate on issues which are of significant national concern, and will not dwell on specific local issues which were also dealt with in many of the individual studies.

Educators look to the results of public opinion polls in order to aid them in setting educational policy. An examination of the studies included in this report suggests that the task is not an easy one. There is concensus among the public about the overall importance of education, and on some very general and broad points. However, no consensus exists on most specific key issues. With few exceptions, the polls show that the public holds extremely divergent views of important educational issues. Reconciling these divergent views constitutes a difficult, perhaps impossible, job for educators.

I. GENERAL VIEW OF EDUCATION

1. The Importance Of Education

The general public is solidly supportive of education in this country. In the studies examined, education was described as being extremely important to one's future success by as many as 79% to 87% of respondents. Education also positioned well as a spending priority, although the manner in which this issue was addressed differed among the various studies. The Ontario study showed education to be second only to health, and about the same as job creation, as an area which should have a strong claim on tax revenues. The Manitoba Education study showed it to have a relatively low priority for receiving more money but high on the list of areas which should be protected from cutbacks. All of these results suggest that while education may not be the top priority on the minds of Canadians, it is definitely still a strong priority.

Sample Findings

National - (CEA)

In your opinion, how important are schools to one's future success?

	%
Extremely important	79
Fairly important	18
Not too important	1
Not at all important	0
Not stated	2

Sample Findings

Manitoba - (Manitoba Education)

1. If you were in charge of the way the province spends your tax dollars and for some reason you could give only one of the following areas more money next year, which would you choose?

2. What about if there wasn't enough money for all the programs? If you had to pick only one area, which would get less money next year? What would it be?

	More Money (%)	Less Money (%)
Health care	28	5
Job training	21	17
Incentives for business development	27	26
Education	10	12
Child and family social services	11	27
(None of them)	1	1
(Not stated)	3	13

2. The Role Of The Schools

The public have multiple and often inconsistent expectations of what the schools should be doing. They are expected by some members of the public to do everything from preparing students for jobs to teaching values.

Many roles for the schools emerged as being important in the various studies. These roles included: to prepare students for the world of work, to teach students how to think and become independent problem-solvers, to impart values, to teach students to become productive members of society and get along with others, to teach basic skills and encourage academic achievement, and to teach everyday life skills. The order of importance of these identified roles of the schools varied across the studies. However, they certainly illustrate the multitude of roles the public schools are expected to play.

Sample Findings

Newfoundland - (Memorial University)

* Below are some of the areas to which our high schools devote attention in educating students. Would you please indicate whether you feel the high schools devote too much attention, not enough attention, or about the right amount of attention to that area.

	Not Enough Attention %
Preparing students who do not go to college or university for a job or career after high school graduation	70
Preparing students for college or university	42
Teaching students to think	58
Developing students' moral and ethical values	52
Developing students' appreciation of art, music, and other cultural interests.	46
Preparing students to become informed citizens prepared to vote at 18 years of age	57

*Note: This question allowed multiple responses.

Respondents in the polls were usually asked about roles of the public schools generally, but in some cases were asked to focus on a particular level of education such as elementary or high schools. Of course, the roles identified in each case were somewhat different as a result. The role of career preparation, for example, was especially likely to be identified as important when the question referred to the high schools specifically. Concern for job training and career preparation was the only identified role which received general consensus regarding its importance. A further illustration of the perceived importance of career preparation was seen in the Saskatchewan poll where most respondents reported that they would want their children to obtain an education in order to get a good job.

Sample Findings

Saskatchewan - (SSTA)

* People have different reasons why they want their children to receive an education. Assuming you had some children in school today, what are the chief reasons why you would want your children to obtain an education?

	%
To obtain a good job/better job opportunities, etc.	50
To obtain knowledge/learn how to think	18
To integrate or fit into society	10
To cope with every day living	10
To be good/useful/responsible citizens	5
Other	9
Don't know	9

*Note: This question allowed multiple responses.

The public tend to agree that more effort is needed by the schools to fulfill this role of career preparation. A significant portion of the public sees preparation for the world of work as a responsibility of the schools that is not successfully being met and is not being given enough attention. The polls also reveal a strong level of support for providing career development services in the schools. Including actual work experience as part of a student's education was also supported, with most respondents approving of some form of work experience, or a work/school co-op program.

II. QUALITY

1. Perceived Current Quality

In spite of a significant variability of opinion, the Canadian public appear to be reasonably satisfied with the schools.

When asked to indicate their level of satisfaction with the schools, between 40% and 80% of respondents indicated that they were satisfied. This wide range in the stated level of satisfaction was largely a result of the manner in which the question was asked. A higher percentage of respondents expressed satisfaction when asked about the public schools generally, while a lower percentage did so when the question asked specifically about the "quality of education" in the schools. Similarly, the expressed level of satisfaction was higher when referring to the elementary schools and was lower when describing the high schools.

Sample Findings

Ontario (OISE)

How satisfied are you with the current situation in Ontario elementary and high schools with regard to the school system in general?

	%
Very satisfied	4
Satisfied	51
Dissatisfied	20
Very dissatisfied	4
Neither/Not stated	20

In addition to asking respondents if they were satisfied with the schools, several surveys directly asked respondents to "grade" the schools in the same manner in which student performance is typically graded. In other words, respondents would assign the schools a grade of A,B,C,D or F to indicate their evaluation of the current level of quality of the public schools. These results again showed a moderate level of satisfaction with the schools. The most frequently given grade was a B, usually assigned by approximately 40% of respondents. Few respondents, between 5% and 15%, graded the schools below a C. The lowest grades were again associated with the high schools. For example, the Manitoba Education study reported that 51% of respondents rated elementary schools as either A or B while only 37% gave an A or B to the high schools. Not only did the grades assigned vary depending on what level of education was being refered to, but grades sometimes varied for different aspects of

the public schools. Aspects of the schools which tended to receive relatively higher ratings included the school buildings, equipment, books, instructional materials, curriculum and the quality of teaching. Aspects which tended to receive lower ratings included preparing students for work, effort demanded of students, discipline and preparing students for post-secondary education.

In all of the studies in which this grading type of question was asked a substantial portion of respondents, between 15% and 25%, were unable to assign a grade. This suggests that a significant portion of the public simply does not know very much about the schools, since people tend to answer a question on a poll even if they really do not have an opinion.

Sample Findings

National and Manitoba

Students are sometimes given grades A,B,C,D, or F (for fail) to denote the quality of their work. Suppose the schools themselves, in your community, were graded in the same way. From your knowledge, experience, or impressions of the schools in your area, what one grade would you give these schools?

National - (CEA)

	%
A	10
B	38
C	27
D	5
F	3
Don't know	17

Manitoba - (Manitoba Education)

	Elementary %	High School %	Comm. College and Trade School %	University %
A	10	7	18	17
B	41	30	41	35
C	31	36	16	21
D	4	11	2	3
F	1	3	1	1
Not stated	13	13	23	24

2. Perceived Quality Over Time

While the quality of education is typically seen by the public as improving over time, there is a consistent portion of the public which express concern regarding a perceived decline in the quality of education.

When asked to compare the quality of their schooling, or of education ten years ago, with the public schools of today, the largest portion of respondents felt that today's schools are better and that the quality of education has improved. This attitude was indicated by between 45% and 57% of respondents. Another group of approximately 25% to 35% of respondents expressed the opinion that the quality of education is declining and that public schools of today are worse than those of the past. One should be cautious, however, in attributing this result to a strong negative attitude towards education today. In fact, it may be more likely that this reflects a strong positive attitude towards the respondents' own education. People tend to romanticize their own educational experience and may, as a result,feel that current education can only suffer in comparison. As an example, the Alberta study reported that 81% of respondents expressed satisfaction with their own education. In the same study, 27% of respondents felt that education today was worse than their experience, even though almost half of these had expressed satisfaction with the current public school system in an earlier question. These results suggest that a significant portion of respondents expressing the view that schools are worse today than they were in the past are probably not being overly critical of today's schools, but rather are voicing a comparatively high level of satisfaction with their own education.

Sample Findings

Manitoba - (Manitoba Education)

If you were to compare the elementary and high schools in Manitoba to those that were available to you when you went to school (whether in Manitoba or not), would you say that the Manitoba schools now are:

	%
Much better	21
Somewhat better	34
About the same	15
Somewhat worse	20
Much worse	6
Not stated	4

Several of the results in the various polls also point out that a consistent portion of the public have some particular concerns about the perceived decline in the quality of education. The CEA study indicated that teacher interest in students was seen to be worse today than in the past by 35% of respondents and 39% felt that standards were worse. A substantial portion of respondents in the University of Manitoba study, 45%, felt that today's teachers are less committed than those of ten years ago. As well, a large portion (67%) agreed that graduates of today use English less correctly than those of ten years ago. While these specific questions were not exhaustive, nor were they asked in all of the studies examined, they do give an indication of some of the specific concerns about the perceived decline in the quality of education.

Sample Findings

National - (CEA)

In general, how would you compare elementary and secondary schools of today to schools of your day, whether in Canada or elsewhere?

	Improved %	Not Changed %	Worsened %	Not Stated %
Teachers' interest in students has...	24	29	35	12
Standards have...	34	19	39	9

3. Perceived Problems

The general public identify specific concerns regarding the public schools which centre around three areas: the students, the social and family situation, and the school system itself. However, no single concern is especially prevalent.

Several of the studies asked respondents to indicate what they felt were the major problems facing the schools today. Most often mentioned were student-related factors such as student attitude, truancy, morality, and discipline. Family and social-related factors such as drugs and alcohol, parental apathy, and the schools' lack of communication with parents were frequently mentioned. Problems associated with the school system were also identified. Some concerns in this area were curriculum, funding, class size, teachers, and preparation for work. The types of concerns described above were consistently expressed, however, no specific problem was mentioned significantly more often than the others.

Sample Findings

National - (CEA)

* What do you think are the biggest problems which the schools in this community must deal with?

	%
Drugs, smoking, alcohol	17
Lack of discipline	17
Pupils' lack of interest/truancy/ attitudes	13
Curriculum problems	11
Teachers' lack of interest/performance	8
Inadequate financial support	7
Pupil/teacher ratio	6
Domestic problems	6
Other	20
No problems	3
Don't know	19

*Note: This question allowed multiple responses.

The issue of discipline in the schools was often dealt with separately in the studies examined. Many people seem to feel that discipline is a problem. It is difficult to determine exactly what portion of the public hold this belief because the various studies asked questions about discipline in very different ways.

Approximately 70% of respondents in the University of Manitoba study agreed that discipline is a problem, however, only 43% of Newfoundland respondents indicated that discipline in the schools is not strict enough. The Ontario study reported that 49% of its respondents were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the current situation in regards to student discipline.

Sample Findings

Manitoba - (University of Manitoba)

Discipline is a problem in Manitoba Schools.

	%
Agree	70
Neutral	9
Disagree	13
Don't know	7

The Calgary study questioned respondents about how they felt misconduct should be dealt with in the schools. Methods preferred were to talk to the student, work with parents, and withhold privileges. At the senior level, however, working with parents and withholding privileges were less favoured. Instead, respondents seemed to prefer the expulsion or suspension of students.

4. Suggested Improvements

The public were much less able to generate possible improvements to the public schools than they were able to identify current problems. When asked to suggest possible improvements to courses or to the schools, a large portion of respondents, approximately 30% to 50% had no opinion. As a result, most questions on this topic involved identifying possible improvements for the respondents.

When respondents were provided with a list of proposed improvements and were asked which ones they felt should be supported or which would be most beneficial, many potential improvements received support. These included an increased emphasis on the teaching of basic skills, having smaller classes, as well as items such as career education, changes in types of programs, and increased discipline. It should be remembered that these items were selected from a given list which might not have contained many other possibly important improvements.

Sample Findings

Calgary - (CBE)

Here is a list of ways that could improve education in the Calgary public schools. Which three do you think would do most to improve the education? Pick three and rank them with a 1, 2, or 3; 1 being the way that would most improve the education, 2 being the second best way to improve the education, and so on.

	First Ranking %
Provide more types of programs (eg. Bilingual, Early Childhood Education)	12
Provide smaller classes	24
Emphasize career education	11
Improve parent, community, school relations	6
Offer more professional development opportunities to teachers	2
Devote more attention to the teaching of basic skills	34
Raise teachers' salaries	1
Enforce stricter discipline	10
Improve school facilities (eg. provide more gym space)	1

Specific potential improvements were also investigated using questions which directly asked for respondents' opinions of these improvements. Class size was one item investigated in this manner, and 65% of Calgary respondents thought that small classes make a great difference in the quality of instruction. Also, instead of laying off surplus teachers, most people feel that class sizes should be reduced or more teachers should be assigned to special education programs. Specific questions about other potential improvements will be discussed later in this report.

III. RESPONSIBILITY

1. Structure and Responsibility

Public education is seen to be the responsibility of many groups; including students, teachers and principals, parents, the local community, and the provincial government. There is significant disagreement on the part of the public regarding exactly which group has the greatest responsibility for education.

When asked who was primarily responsible for the quality of education in the schools, 34% of Saskatchewan respondents named the Department of Education, and 30% indicated that the teachers were responsible. The government was seen as being responsible because they set standards for education, while the teachers are responsible due to their direct provision of educational services. When children do poorly in school, the public tend to blame the parents and home life first, followed by the teachers and the students themselves. The Calgary study identified the local school board as the group which should have the greatest influence on what is taught in the schools. However, many groups received significant mention as a group which should have the greatest or second greatest influence. These groups were parents (37%), school boards (36%), the provincial government (35%), individual teachers (31%), and the individual school (27%). No one group was seen by a majority of respondents to be primarily responsible for public education.

Sample Findings

Calgary - (CBE)

Here is a list of groups that have a say about what is taught in the Calgary public schools. In your opinion, which three do you think should have the greatest influence? Rank them with a 1,2,or 3; 1 being the one you think should have the greatest influence, 2 the second greatest, etc.

	1st %	1st or 2nd %
Provincial government	26	35
School board	33	36
Individual school	10	27
Individual teacher	14	31
Parents	15	37
Students	3	8

The public not only differ regarding the division of responsibility between the various groups mentioned above, but they also disagree on the division between local decision-making authority and provincial government authority.

Opinion was divided on questions regarding the level of decision-making. When asked which was the better system, respondents in the Saskatchewan study chose both a system where the Department of Education determines what is taught (53%), and a system where locally-elected school board members have a strong say in what is taught (43%). In a similar question, most preferred a system where provincial inspectors develop and monitor programs (59%), but a strong liking was also seen for a system where local school boards develop and monitor programs (36%). In a question from the Ontario study regarding authority for decision-making in the high schools, some respondents felt that principals should have more authority (37%), while an almost equal portion felt that the local community should have more authority (36%).

Sample Findings

Saskatchewan - (SSTA)

Which do you think is a better system:

	%
A system where locally-elected school board members have a strong say in what is taught in local schools	43
Or a system where the Department of Education would determine what is taught in schools	53
Not stated	4

The largest portion of respondents in the Saskatchewan study felt that the provincial government should not be responsible for setting and collecting a tax to fund education totally. In addition, if the province were to fund education totally, many people (39%) thought that they would end up paying more taxes. The public thinks that the quality of education would become worse (34%) or would not change (51%) if the province took over the local school boards. The majority of CEA respondents (57%) express a fair amount of confidence in their local school board's ability to deal with school issues. Clearly, there is little support on the part of the general public for a large shift in the balance of responsibility and authority to the provincial government.

2. Evaluation and Standards

At the same time that the public want to provide options to individual students, they are also demanding an increased emphasis on formal standards. This apparent contradiction means that educational policy will always be criticized from one side or the other.

The desire for treating students differently can be seen in the support for issuing different types of diplomas for different high school programs as reported by a majority of respondents in the Alberta study (68%). The Ontario study revealed significant support for streaming students into different programs, with more than one in three supporting such a step at Grade 9 or earlier. Even the willingness to allow students to leave school at age 16, as was demonstrated in the Calgary study, reveals this public tendency to favour providing the individual student with some educational options.

The desire for increased formal standards is exhibited by the Alberta findings that almost three-quarters of respondents felt that compulsory Grade 12 exams would result in better assessment of student achievement as well as greater student effort to achieve. Most respondents in the University of Manitoba study (70%) expressed the opinion that all students should be required to pass a standard provincial exam in order to graduate from high school.

Further evidence of divided opinion in the area of evaluation and standards is not hard to find. Approximately half of the Saskatchewan respondents want exams prepared by local teachers, and the other half of the respondents want province-wide exams prepared by the Department of Education. The Ontario study suggests, however, that there may be a willingness to accept compromise in this area, as the largest portion of respondents in this study preferred a system of student evaluation which utilized provincial tests to supplement teacher-made tests.

Sample Findings

Ontario - (OISE)

Which one of the following do you think is the best way of judging the academic progress of students in the higher grades?

	%
The individual teacher should make sole responsibility for making assessments	19
Assessments should be based on tests set jointly by teachers in the school	30
Provincial tests should be used to supplement teacher-made tests	37
Provincial tests should be the most important	12

IV. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

1. Current and Desired Contact

Public involvement and contact with the schools is low. Increasing this level of public involvement in education is seen to be a needed and positive change. However, individual members of the public may have no desire to become involved personally.

Many people feel that the general public has little or no say in how the schools are run. When asked about their personal contact with the schools, most respondents report having no contact with their local schools. Reported attendance at school board meetings was also low. In the Calgary study, for example, 85% of respondents indicated that they never attend board meetings, while 34% never vote at school board elections. Approximately 70% of Saskatchewan respondents had never attended a public meeting organized by their school board. These figures could conceivably be even higher than reported because some people may say that they participate more than they really do in order to appear to be doing the "right" thing.

Sample Findings

Alberta - (Alberta Education)

How much, if any, contact do you, yourself, have with your local school?

	%
A great deal (more than 15 hours per year)	15
A moderate amount (5-15 hours per year)	15
Not very much (1-4 hours per year)	21
None	49

Another measure of contact with the schools is simply whether or not there are children in the family who are enroled in the public school system. In the studies examined, between 40% and 60% of respondents indicated that there were no children in their household attending public school.

A significant portion of the respondents in the studies expressed dissatisfaction with the current level of public involvement in education. In Calgary, 52% of respondents expressed this opinion. The CEA poll reported that 48% of its respondents felt that the public has too little say in how the schools are run. A large majority of respondents in the Manitoba Education study (80%) favour giving local residents more say in how their schools are run. Alberta residents, as well, showed support for giving greater say to local parent-teacher associations. All of these results point to a desire for increased public involvement in the schools.

Sample Findings

Manitoba - (Manitoba Education)

Local residents should be given more say in how their schools are run.

	%
Strongly agree	42
Moderately agree	38
Neutral	3
Moderately disagree	13
Strongly disagree	3

An important issue, however, is whether the public as individuals want to have greater participation in education. As we have seen, individuals' current contact with the schools is low. Is this likely to change? Questions in the Saskatchewan study suggest that it might not, in spite of the general desire for public involvement. Respondents who had never attended a public meeting organized by their local school board were asked their reasons for this. The most commonly provided reasons were that the respondent had no children in school, or that they were simply not interested. This unwillingness to become involved is also suggested in the fact that 75% of respondents in this study reported that they would not be interested in becoming a school board member if they were asked to do so. Their reasons here were primarily lack of time, other priorities, and lack of interest.

Sample Findings

Saskatchewan - (SSTA)

If someone asked you to become a school board member, would you be interested?

	%
Yes	23
No	75
Don't know	2

* If no, why not?	%
No time/other priorities	23
Not interested/don't want responsibility	21
No children in school	16
No experience/knowledge	9
Health/age reasons	9
Other reasons	10
No reason/don't know	14

*Note: This question allowed multiple responses.

The public's desire for greater input, coupled with the individual's resistance to becoming involved, suggest that it might be difficult to increase public involvement in the schools. This could be a case of "it should be done but I don't want to do it."

2. Knowledge and Information

Members of the public can receive information about the schools in several ways, and yet the amount of information and knowledge they actually get about the schools appears to be minimal.

Most often mentioned as sources of information about the schools are newspapers, school newsletters, friends or other parents, children, and school staff. The level of mention of these sources varied depending on whether the study asked which sources were used or which were considered the best sources. Newspapers and school newsletters were seen as the best sources. Friends or other parents and children were mentioned as sources most often used to judge the quality of the schools. A majority of respondents in the Saskatchewan study reported that they had not received any newsletters or pamphlets concerning the schools in the past year (62%), and had not read any articles about schools (62%), or heard anything on radio or TV (67%) in the past couple of months.

In the studies examined, respondents with children in the schools were more likely to be satisfied with the amount of information they had about the schools than were non-parents. Given the fact that many citizens and taxpayers do not have children in schools, communication with this group is a particularly important issue for the schools. Non-parents were more likely to describe themselves as "not knowledgeable at all" regarding the general operation of school boards. In both groups, however, a substantial minority were dissatisfied with their level of information and knowledge about the schools. The proportion of respondents expressing this view varied between 20% and 40%.

Sample Findings

Calgary - (CBE)

Are you satisfied with the information you are receiving about activities in the Calgary public schools?

	Total	Parents	Non-Parents
Yes	56	75	43
No	24	22	26
Not interested/no opinion	10	3	31

In an attempt to investigate the actual level of knowledge on the part of the public, the Saskatchewan study asked respondents several questions designed to test this knowledge. When asked to name a responsibility of school boards, 20% of respondents were unable to name even one. The proportion who were unable to name a local school principal was 56%, and those unable to name their school board representative was 81%. When told that the provincial government provides half of the public schools' funding, 20% of respondents could not suggest where the other half of the funding comes from. Respondents with children attending public schools were more knowledgeable. These results certainly suggest a deficiency in public knowledge.

Sample Findings

Saskatchewan - (SSTA)

Do you know the school board representative in your area?

	Total	Parents	Non-Parents
Name provided	19	29	15
No name provided	81	71	85

V. FUNDING

1. Current and Future Spending

The general public is cautiously supportive of educational funding. Their hesitancy is rooted in a concern that more money doesn't necessarily mean better education.

When asked what should happen to spending for education in the following year, the majority of respondents recommended increasing spending only somewhat. In the Ontario study, for example, 53% of respondents expressed the opinion that educational spending should be increased only enough to keep up with inflation. Approximately 45%-55% of respondents in the various studies indicated that the current level of spending was appropriate or about right. The remainder of respondents were divided between whether spending was too high or too low. Clearly, there is no support either for large increases or decreases in educational spending.

Sample Findings

Newfoundland - (Memorial University)

What would you like to see happen to the spending on elementary and high school education in next year's provincial budget?

	%
Increased greatly	21
Increased somewhat	55
Remain the same	18
Decreased somewhat	4
Decreased greatly	1

Several of the studies examined asked respondents how satisfied they were with the current value obtained for taxpayers' money in education. Typically, about as many people were dissatisfied as were satisfied. There is a concern on the part of a substantial portion of the public about value for their education dollar. This is, of course, linked to their willingness to pay more toward education. An illustration of this is the fact that the CEA poll reported that 46% of respondents were willing to pay more to support education, and 45% were not. In the Manitoba Education survey, increased payment was linked to the quality of education. In this case, a small majority of respondents agreed with improving education even if it means raising taxes. Support for increased spending was still cautious, but, slightly less so if such an increase was expected to result in greater quality. The public do not necessarily believe that more

money equals better education. In the Manitoba Education study, 65% of respondents disagreed that students would get a better education if schools were given more money. In a similar question, 70% of Alberta respondents did not believe that more money would necessarily result in better education. Another illustration is that approximately half of the Newfoundland respondents felt that one could cut costs in the schools without lowering the quality of education. Educational funding, therefore, cannot be examined independently from the desired result of better education.

Sample Findings

Manitoba - (Manitoba Education)

If schools were given more tax dollars, students would get a better education.

	%
Strongly agree	10
Moderately agree	22
Neutral	3
Moderately disagree	41
Strongly disagree	24

2. Methods of Funding and Cutbacks

The less directly individual members of the public see themselves paying for education, the better they like it. When respondents in the Newfoundland study were asked to suggest ways for the provincial government to raise additional money for education, the preferred methods were a lottery and business income tax. Least preferred methods were sales tax and personal income tax. Alberta respondents recommended holding the line on tax increases for education, although a provincial tax increase was preferable to an increase in local tax.

Sample Findings

Newfoundland - (Memorial University)

If the provincial government is "forced" to find a means of raising additional money for education, which of the following ways do you think is the best and which is the worst?

	Best %	Worst %
Higher property tax	1	12
Higher personal income tax	6	23
Higher sales tax	2	25
Higher local school tax	9	11
Higher business income tax	26	1
Lottery for education	41	11

There is some support on the part of the public for the users of education to bear the cost although this is also opposed by a large portion of respondents. A surprising 28% of respondents in the University of Manitoba study agreed with the idea that only people who have children in school should be required to pay for public education. In the Alberta poll, approximately 65% of respondents approved of having user fees for such things as books, lab facilities, extra-curricular activities, and vocational education materials. However, if user fees were not charged, respondents would again prefer an increase in provincial tax to an increase in local tax.

If it was necessary for the schools to cut costs, the public show some support for several methods of doing so. Support was seen primarily for reductions in non-school staff, spending for substitute teachers, and the number of administrators. User fees for busing, and cutbacks in school buildings were also supported. Respondents in the studies examined were most resistant to reducing the number of teachers and reducing spending on special needs programs and services.

3. Private Schools

The public are divided on whether private schools should be government funded or not. More respondents were able to support public funding however, if the private schools were government-licensed. Significant support was seen for licensing and standards for facilities, curriculum, and teaching staff in the private schools.

Given equal funding, about two-thirds of respondents would prefer children to be educated in public schools. However, a large majority (93%) feel that parents should have the right to choose which form of education their children should receive.

Sample Findings

Alberta - (Alberta Education)

Do you think that all private schools should operate under set government license and standards, or should they be allowed to operate independently?

	%
Should be licensed by government	66
Should be independent if they choose	30
Don't know	4

VI. OTHER MAJOR ISSUES

1. Programs and Curriculum

The public is generally supportive of the schools providing special programs and curriculum such as sex education, language instruction, and programs for the handicapped. There is strong disagreement, however, on which specific programs and curriculum choices should be provided and in what manner.

Attitudes toward the provision of special programs were investigated. The Calgary study named specific local programs and asked respondents if these programs should continue to be offered. A significant portion of the respondents were not aware of these programs. However, only 13% felt that the programs should not be offered. Respondents in the Manitoba Education study felt that it was very necessary to provide special programs for the handicapped. In the same study, a somewhat smaller portion of respondents felt that it was very necessary to provide programs for the gifted, with more seeing programs for the gifted as moderately necessary. Most Alberta respondents (69%) felt that physically handicapped children should be integrated into the schools, but the majority (54%) felt that the mentally handicapped should have separate schools.

Curriculum concerns centred around which subjects should or should not be offered. Some of the studies asked directly if various items such as computer education, sex education, and drug or alcohol education should be offered in the schools. Strong support was seen for each of these, with between 70% and 90% of respondents favouring their inclusion in school curriculum. The University of Manitoba study reported, however, that the public support for sex education was divided between those who wished it to be required curriculum, and those who preferred it to be voluntary.

Sample Findings

Manitoba - (University of Manitoba)

How do you think high schools should deal with sex education? Do you think sex education should be required, voluntary, or not offered at all?

	%
Required	42
Voluntary	47
Not offered	8
Don't know	4

Another subject area commonly investigated in the polls is language education. Learning a second language was seen to be important by 73% of University of Manitoba respondents, and voluntary immersion was supported by 76%. Support for third language learning, that is, languages other than French or English, was not as great as this. Half of the respondents in the Manitoba Education survey supported third languages being taught as a subject during regular school hours. An additional 34% approved of third language education taking place after normal school hours. The public are not as supportive of third language immersion as they are of second language immersion. In the Manitoba Education study, respondents were evenly divided on this topic, with 47% approving of third language immersion and 48% disapproving.

Sample Findings

Manitoba - (University of Manitoba)

Are you for or against voluntary immersion programs to allow high school and elementary students to become fluent in a second language?

	%
For	76
Against	14
Neutral	7
Don't know	3

Curriculum considerations were investigated in other ways in specific studies. For example, the Alberta study had respondents go through a lengthy list of curriculum choices at the junior and senior high school levels and indicate for each whether they considered the subject to be "core" (required), "optional", or "unnecessary". Responses varied greatly in this regard. A large variety of courses were considered to be "core", ranging from reading to religious studies. Also, courses considered to be "core" by some respondents, were usually considered to be "unnecessary" by others.

APPENDIX

STUDIES INCLUDED IN THE REPORT

1. D.W. Livingston, D.J. Hart, and L.D. McLean, Public Attitudes Toward Education in Ontario in 1982: Fourth OISE Survey (Toronto: OISE, 1983).

   A representative sample of 1,050 adults, 18 years of age and over, were interviewed in their homes across Ontario. Also, a special sample of 134 corporate executives responded to a mailed questionnaire. Interviews were conducted by Gallup.

2. "Public Opinion Survey, January-February 1983", Calgary Board of Education, Calgary, Alberta, 1983.

   Using a two-stage cluster method, an initial target sample of 2,100 Calgary households was chosen. Using personal interviews, 1,027 completed surveys were obtained. All respondents were adult residents of Calgary identified as public school supporters by their answer to the question "If you were to vote in a school board election, would you vote for the public school board or the separate school board?" Interviews were conducted by Opinion Research Index.

3. A Poll of Public Opinion About Education (Regina: Saskatchewan School Trustees' Association, 1984).

   A total of 513 in-person interviews were conducted across the province. Probability sampling was used which took into account community size. Interviews were conducted by Canwest Opinion Results Group Ltd.

4. The 1984 CEA Poll of Canadian Opinion on Education (Toronto: Canadian Education Association, 1984).

   In total, 2,109 Canadian adults were interviewed in their homes across Canada. The questions in this study were asked as a part of the Gallup Omnibus Poll which combines questions on several topics into one survey.

5. P.J. Warren, Public Attitudes Towards Education in Newfoundland and Labrador 1983 (St. John's, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1983).

   A random stratified sample of voters in each of several identified political districts was used. Community size was considered. Of the representative sample of 1,513 adults, a total of 1,199 questionnaires were completed. Questionnaires were either delivered by hand or by mail. Some questionnaires were completed with the assistance of interviewers when the use of a printed questionnaire caused difficulties.

6. Greg Mason, Attitudes of the Manitoba Population Toward Education in Manitoba (Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of Manitoba, 1984).

A systematic random sample of 1,700 phone numbers were drawn from the MTS data base. There were 811 completed surveys and these respondents were statistically weighted in order to be representative of the Manitoba population with respect to sex, age, income, and area of residence (Winnipeg, non-Winnipeg).

7. "Gallup Summary Report" prepared for Alberta Education, 1984.

Gallup conducted in-home interviews with 1,054 adults in Alberta. The sample was weighted in order to be representative of the Alberta population with respect to age and sex. The sample was a modified probability sample that considered community size as well as a quota sample of rural farm and non-farm households.

8. Public Attitudes to Education (Manitoba Education, 1984).

A total of 1,013 telephone interviews were conducted throughout Manitoba. Random digit dialing was used in order to give all Manitoba phone numbers an equal chance of being selected.